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The Impact of Simulated Firearms Training on Correctional Officer Firearms Requalification

Simulated firearms training for Correctional Officer recruits offers long-term skill retention benefits.

Why we did this study

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has piloted simulated firearms training for correctional officer (CO) recruits. Unlike live fire training involving ammunition, this innovative training method entails the use of laser-based technology in a simulated environment. The use of simulated firearms has been utilized in various military and law enforcement settings for its associated safety, efficiency, and cost-savings. However, research examining the effectiveness of this technology concerning firearms skill acquisition and retention remains limited.

This report represents the second phase of research examining the effectiveness of simulated firearms training in a correctional setting. The purpose of the current study was to examine the long-term effects of simulated firearms training in regards to skill retention.

What we did

This phase of research sought to determine how the type of training affects the requalification performance of COs one-year post training. An experimental group of COs who received only simulated firearms training (n = 76) was compared to a control group who received primarily live fire training (n = 80).

Performance over time from initial qualification to requalification were examined, alongside comparisons between COs trained with simulated firearms and those trained with traditional live fire. Outcomes included both evaluation scores and pass/fail rates on theoretical understanding, accuracy, as well as safety and handling.

What we found

Overall, there were no differences in requalification pass/fail rates between COs trained in a simulated environment and COs who received primarily live firearms training. In general, COs tended to show higher performance at requalification on all evaluation measures, regardless of training modality.

In comparison to COs who received live fire training, those trained using simulated firearms demonstrated higher scores on the in-class evaluation of safety and handling. No differences were found between the groups on safety and handling evaluated at the live fire range or on theoretical understanding. While COs trained in the simulated environment demonstrated lower scores on accuracy during the initial qualification, there was no difference in accuracy performance at requalification between the groups.

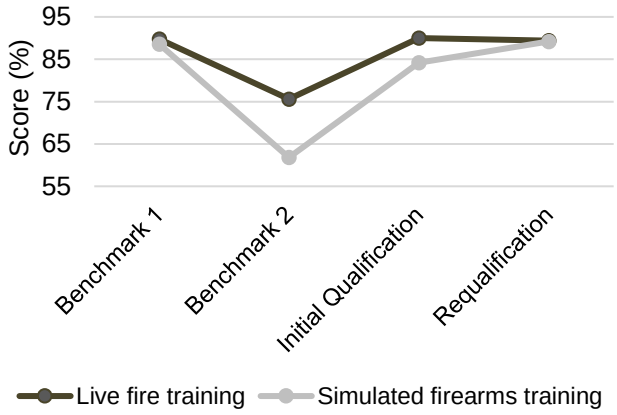

Figure. Average accuracy percentage scores over time.

What it means

Viewed collectively, the results from this study suggest that simulated firearms training is associated with long-term retention benefits, as demonstrated by performance at requalification one-year post training. While this study highlights the relevance of simulated firearms as an effective alternative to traditional training involving live fire, future research should explore the optimal use of simulated firearms and the advancement of innovative technologies in training environments.

For more information

Hanby, L. & Ridha, T. (2020). *The Impact of Simulated Firearms Training on Correctional Officer Requalification* (Research Report R-433). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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